Eaton, Charles Henry
A decade of magazine
literature

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A DECADE OF MAGAZINE LITERATURE;

1888 - 1897

by

Charles Henry Eaton

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[Excerpt from the Forum,

October, 1898]

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[Eaton, Charles Henry]

A DECADE OF MAGAZINE LITERATURE.—1888–1897.

TEN years ago a friend, interested in my intellectual growth, and desirous of furnishing me with material for professional use, began sending me, as an annual Christmas gift, five of the leading American and English magazines. They were THE FORUM, "The North American Review," "The Nineteenth Century," "The Contemporary Review," and "The Fortnightly Review." During a decade these magazines have come each month with the latest word on all the great questions of the day, until they have created a storehouse of contemporaneous literature available for immediate use. They form far more than a collection of fugitive sketches by skilful hacks: they make a library of permanent value, in which are represented the ablest thinkers and statesmen, the wisest scholars and scientists, the subtlest critics and philosophers. He who has read this library has come into touch with some of the finest spirits of his time. Many of the works which have become permanent authorities in science, religion, politics, education, and statecraft have been first printed in the magazines.

The monthly reviews have most of the advantages and few of the disadvantages of the daily press. Like the newspapers, they must furnish articles which have value in themselves; and the articles must be timely. They must be written, too, by men or women who can command attention. But the newspaper is ephemeral. Its collection of facts and its editorial discussions are hurried and haphazard. What else can be expected when the history of the world for a day is to be written in a day, and its philosophy and practice distilled? It is not so with the review. It does not cater to the lower order of intelligence: its public is select. Its work may be laid out for a year in advance; its contributors may be selected with the greatest care, and in many cases they have time to do their work after research and deliberation; while every new genius brings his offerings to the judgment-seat of the editor, that he may obtain an audience for his cherished offspring.

In the reviews one may feel the pulse of society, follow the movements of the people, enter into the inner policies of prime ministers,

study the course of Spain in the Philippines; of Russia and England in China; of England, France, and Germany in Africa. One may catch the spirit of ancient and modern art, and observe the birth and growth of great economic and religious institutions. He who would be equipped for a life of thought, for the discussion of the great problems of nature and humanity as viewed by experts, must keep himself informed in magazine literature.

The clergyman will find the magazines of more value than his denominational paper; since in this larger forum appear not merely the members of his own theological party, but men of all parties, and the discussions are carried on by the ablest disputants and in a truly catholic spirit. The politician must listen and ponder when his opponent, far from heated caucus, addresses him in the quiet of his library and in the calm utterances of the reviews. For the scientist and the financier the review becomes a well-regulated clearing-house, in which obligations are recognized and adjusted.

The general impression received from a decade of magazine literature, in the broadening of one's intellectual horizon, the enriching of memory and imagination, and the growth of human sympathy and companionship, has been so significant, that I have thought it worth the while to analyze more carefully its contribution to the intellectual life of our time. In view of the extent of the work, I have selected two reviews of the first class, whose circulation and general character entitle them to be called representative—THE FORUM and "The Nineteenth Century." Whatever we learn by an examination of these magazines we may conclude is approximately true of others of the same kind.

My first step in this analysis has been to make the table which is printed on the following page. While this has been done with considerable difficulty and hesitation, I think it classifies with sufficient accuracy the articles published in the two reviews during the period under consideration.

An analysis of the table discloses: (1) *General World-Tendencies.* There can be no doubt that the great movements of the present age are economic and political. All our ideals and ways of life are becoming commercialized. The rise and growth of democracy, which have characterized the present century, have reached their climax toward its end. The last decade has been largely occupied in the discussion of the rights of working-men, scales of wages, and the length of the working-day. Men have studied, as never before, the laws which underlie the production and distribution of wealth, the nature of money, and the methods

Classification of Articles in "The Forum" and "The Nineteenth Century" during the Decade 1888–1897.

	Science.		Religion.		Political Economy.		History.		Fiction.		Education.		Politics.		Philosophy.		Poetry.		Miscellaneous.		Totals.	
	F.	N. C.	F.	N. C.	F.	N. C.	F.	N. C.	F.	N. C.	F.	N. C.	F.	N. C.	F.	N. C.	F.	N. C.	F.	N. C.	F.	N. C.
1888.....	6	7	6	9	33	21	5	5	4	1	25	10	26	27	..	2	..	4	29	47	131	133
1889.....	7	9	8	18	30	18	4	11	3	..	12	3	33	36	..	..	3	3	28	43	130	142
1890.....	15	14	10	9	32	26	2	12	3	..	3	..	35	31	..	..	..	1	25	48	125	141
1891.....	8	13	7	18	38	27	6	15	2	..	5	3	32	16	..	1	..	6	40	60	138	158
1892.....	2	16	6	4	60	31	2	8	1	..	5	3	33	41	..	..	3	13	45	82	155	198
1893.....	8	11	8	18	45	22	4	17	6	3	11	5	32	23	..	..	..	6	32	55	149	160
1894.....	6	7	14	16	49	24	6	10	3	1	7	5	30	26	1	2	..	..	27	84	143	175
1895.....	2	7	6	23	50	17	10	15	7	..	14	5	13	35	..	5	..	1	41	68	143	176
1896.....	4	9	8	13	24	24	6	18	4	2	11	14	38	36	..	2	..	1	40	65	135	184
1897.....	3	9	5	11	40	21	13	21	1	2	10	6	31	42	..	2	6	2	25	57	134	173
Totals.....	61	102	78	139	401	231	58	132	34	9	103	54	303	313	1	14	12	37	332	609	1,383	1,640

of taxation. There has been much social restlessness: the appearances of the revolutionist and the anarchist have been more frequent and threatening. The two reviews in question have registered these conditions. "The Nineteenth Century" has given 231 articles, by the ablest thinkers and writers, on different phases of political economy and sociology. THE FORUM has printed 401. Together, out of a total of 3,023 articles the two magazines have given 632 on these subjects—nearly one-fifth of the entire matter published. The larger number given by THE FORUM is due to the fact that the supreme problems with us to-day are economic. They are as acute as the subject of slavery in the early sixties.

Politics in England and America has been largely the management of a nascent democracy. Great world-movements find their best illustrations in England and America. There were 313 articles on politics in "The Nineteenth Century," and 303 in THE FORUM; a total of 616, or 16 less than on economics. Economics and politics together number 1,248—less than one-half of the whole number.

Science is well represented; 102 articles having appeared in "The Nineteenth Century," and 61 in THE FORUM—a total of 163, or about one-nineteenth of the entire number. Religion has 139 in "The Nineteenth Century," and 78 in THE FORUM—a total of 217, or about one-fourteenth of the whole. Science and religion together number 380 articles, nearly one-eighth of the whole. These figures fairly represent the interest taken by the public in discussions of science and religion, as compared with those of economics and politics. In America, where suffrage is universal, and the public school is so important an institution, education commands large attention. During the ten years THE FORUM has had 103 articles, and "The Nineteenth Century" 54; 157 in all, or about one-nineteenth of the whole.

The table indicates the somewhat narrow interest in philosophy and poetry, both in England and America; although it must be said that, philosophy having its special organs, the showing is not quite accurate. "The Nineteenth Century" had 14 articles on philosophy, and on poetry 37; THE FORUM, philosophy 1; poetry 12. Philosophy and poetry combined make but one-forty-seventh of the whole.

History is represented in "The Nineteenth Century" by 132 articles, in THE FORUM by 58; 190 in all, or a little less than one-sixteenth of the entire number. There are 34 articles on fiction in THE FORUM, and 9 in "The Nineteenth Century"; 43 in all, or about one-seventieth of the whole. Those classified as "Miscellaneous" number in "The Nineteenth Century" 609, in THE FORUM 332; a total of 941, or about one-

third of the whole. These articles, dealing with nearly every imaginable subject, suggest the almost infinite variety of the interests of modern life.

The table also shows: (2) *Points of Agreement and Contrast between American and English Thought.* The points of agreement are many; those of contrast, few and superficial. Nothing, perhaps, will show with more distinctness the essential unity of the English race than an examination of the matter and method of the literature of a decade. The demand of the public and of the world of authorship is, "What are Englishmen and Americans thinking about?" "What ideals and motives are supreme in Great Britain and the United States?" If there is to be an alliance of England and America, its sure ground will be not military, but intellectual. If the two nations are thinking the same thoughts, admiring the same personalities, and cherishing the same imaginings, their union is certain. That Englishmen and Americans are at heart one, that they are meeting and solving the same political, social, and religious problems, is evident in the unconscious revelation of ten years' writing for the registers and framers of public opinion—the great reviews.

It will be observed, as I have already pointed out, that both the English and the American reviews have a large number of articles on politics. "The Nineteenth Century" has 313, THE FORUM 303—a total of 616. But the largest number of articles on any one subject is 632 on political economy. Of this number, 401 are in THE FORUM, and 231 in "The Nineteenth Century." There can be no doubt that economic questions in our country, where industrial difficulties have been more pronounced, are more insistent than in England, where various adjustments have been brought about which we have not accomplished. The next largest number in THE FORUM is on education, 103; "The Nineteenth Century" having 54. Religion has the third place, THE FORUM giving 78 articles. But the English people, who are said to be readers of sermons, are also readers of articles on religion; and "The Nineteenth Century" gives 139. The American magazine publishes 61 articles on science; the English magazine, 102. THE FORUM prints 58 on history; "The Nineteenth Century," 132. England is writing history: America is making it. America, it would seem, takes more interest in the novel, since THE FORUM has 34 on fiction; while "The Nineteenth Century" has but 9. England, on the other hand, appears to show a greater interest in philosophy and poetry; her representative furnishing 14 articles on the former subject and 37 on the latter. The American representative has 1 on

philosophy, and 12 on poetry. Greater variety is indicated by "The Nineteenth Century" in miscellaneous subjects, with 609 articles out of 1,640; THE FORUM'S figures being 332 out of 1,383. But THE FORUM shows greater brevity.

(3) *The Character of Articles.* I had thought that a decade would show changes in contributions, corresponding to the assumed alterations in public feeling and life. It is possible that the period examined is too short a one to secure definite results, or it may be that the prevailing problems of society and life have not altered. It would be interesting to study the formative period in our national history in the magazines, corresponding to our modern ones, if only they existed. The coming historian will find an inexhaustible storehouse of material in the magazines of to-day. To follow the growth of Abolitionism, or to study Reconstruction and the education of the freeman, or to investigate the growth of democracy since the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832, is to feel the throb of the great human heart. No such changes are visible in the ten years just closed. But it will be observed that the table indicates a deepening of the popular interest in political economy and politics. In other respects, so far as the articles published indicate, the world has proceeded on an even course.

It is sometimes said, that, as the century draws to a close, Science, which achieved its great triumph in the "Origin of Species" in 1858, is declining, and that Religion is reassuming her rightful place as the superior mistress of men's minds and lives. But there is nothing in the table before us to show that this is the case. The number and interest of the articles remain about the same for the decade. We have reason, however, to believe that true science and true religion, as they enlarge their borders, grow at once broader and more humble; mutually approaching one another. Higher views of industrial relations, of education, of political rights and duties, are gaining ground as humanity approaches its coronation. When that shall come, the world will acknowledge as among its chief benefactors, defenders, and inspirers, the reviews and their discriminating and hopeful editors.

CHARLES HENRY EATON.

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